

## **Puberty, Periods & Artistic Swimming**

Below you will find a fact sheet that you can review by yourself and with your child. It provides you and your child with the most up-to-date information on puberty and menstruation. If you have more questions, there are some links to trustworthy websites and links to additional resources of puberty. You will notice that this information is written in a gender-neutral format and there is a section on transgender and non-binary folks and menstruation. At the end, you will find all the diagrams for reference.

### **Key Messages:**

- **Menstruation is different for every body**
- **Listen to your body, know your limits**
- **Get to know your body**
- **Be prepared**
- **There are many options for period management**
- **This can be a confusing, emotional, difficult time & it can also be awesome**
- **You got this!**

### **What is menstruation?**

Mensuration- aka having your period — is when blood and tissue from your uterus comes out of your vagina. It typically happens every month or every 21-35 days (about 1 month 4 and a half days), the average being about 28 days (about 4 weeks).

Typically, people with ovaries begin to menstruate between the ages of 9 to 15. The average age is around 12 years old in North America. Some people begin to menstruate before 9 and some people menstruate a little later. This is typical for you. If you are 16 and have not started your period, you can talk to your nurse practitioner or family doctor.

Most people will begin menstruation 2 to 3 years after the development of breasts and 6 to 12 months after the appearance of cervical mucus. People typically start to grow pubic hair on their underarms and vulvas between 7 to 15 years old.

Most people will continue menstruating until they are 45-55 years old. This is called menopause. The cycle of menopause can last 7 to 14 years.

### **What is the menstrual cycle?**

Your menstrual cycle helps your body prepare for pregnancy every month. It also makes you have a period if you are not pregnant. Your menstrual cycle and your period are controlled by hormones called estrogen and progesterone.

- **Here is how it all goes down:**
  - You have 2 ovaries, and each one holds a bunch of eggs. The eggs are super tiny — too small to see with the naked eye.

- During your menstrual cycle, hormones make the eggs in your ovaries mature — when an egg is mature, that means it's ready to be fertilized by a sperm cell. These hormones also make the lining of your uterus thick and spongy. So, if your egg does get fertilized, it has a nice cushy place to land and start a pregnancy. This lining is made of tissue and blood, like almost everything else inside our bodies. It has lots of nutrients to help a pregnancy grow.
- About halfway through your menstrual cycle, your hormones tell one of your ovaries to release a mature egg — this is called ovulation. Most people don't feel it when they ovulate, but some ovulation symptoms are bloating, spotting, or a little pain in your lower belly that you may only feel on one side.
- Once the egg leaves your ovary, it travels through one of your fallopian tubes toward your uterus.
- If pregnancy doesn't happen, your body doesn't need the thick lining in your uterus. Your lining breaks down, and the blood, nutrients, and tissue flow out of your body through your vagina. Voilà, it's your period!
- If you do get pregnant, your body needs the lining — that's why your period stops during pregnancy. Your period comes back when you're not pregnant anymore

(Planned Parenthood, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/health-and-wellness/menstruation>)

### **Transgender, Genderqueer and Non-Binary Folks & Periods:**

Not everybody who gets a period identifies as a girl or woman. Transgender men, non-binary and genderqueer people who have uteruses, vaginas, fallopian tubes, and ovaries also get their periods.

Having a period can be a stressful experience for some trans folks because it's a reminder that their bodies don't match their true [gender identity](#) — this discomfort and anxiety are sometimes called gender dysphoria. Other trans people might not be too bothered by their periods. Either reaction is normal and okay.

Sometimes trans people who haven't reached puberty yet take hormones (called puberty blockers) to prevent all the gendered body changes that happen during puberty, including periods. And people who already get periods can use certain types of birth control (like the [implant](#) or [hormonal IUD](#)) that help lighten or stop their periods. Hormone replacement therapy, like taking testosterone, may also stop your period. If you start taking testosterone, your period will go away. But this is reversible — if you stop taking testosterone, your period will come back. There can be some changes in your menstrual cycle before it stops for good. Periods get lighter and shorter over time or come when you don't expect it. You may have spotting or cramping occasionally, until you stop getting your period, and sometimes even after it seems to have stopped — this is normal. Testosterone injections make your periods go away faster than testosterone cream.

If you experience gender dysphoria when you get your period, know that you're not alone. It may be helpful to check out our [resources](#) and find a trans-friendly doctor in your area that you can talk to.

(Planned Parenthood, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/health-and-wellness/menstruation>)

### Your First Period:

Your first period can last anywhere from 2 to 7 days. It may be very light, with just a few spots of brownish blood. Or it may start and end more brownish but be brighter red on heavier flow days. It is typical to have your period one month and then not the next at first. After a couple of cycles, you will notice you begin to have more red blood.

(SOGC, 2022, [yourperiod.ca](http://yourperiod.ca))

### Preparing for Your Period:

A couple of days before your period you may notice a couple of different things. You may notice you are feeling more irritable, hungry, and tired. You may also experience lower abdominal cramping, breast tenderness, lower backaches, diarrhea or nausea or dizziness. You may also notice skin changes such as pimples.

Tender Breasts	Bloating	Fluid Retention	Muscle Aches
Joint Pains	Headaches	Acne	Abdominal Cramps
Diarrhea	Constipation	Lower Back pain	Trouble Sleeping
Low Energy	Fatigue		

You have probably heard of pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). PMS differs for each person and affects each person differently. Societally, anger and irritability that women and female presenting folks express are often chalked up to PMS. While PMS can make people feel more irritable, anger is a normal emotion and is often a normal response to a situation that has made you upset or frustrated. Labelling anger that women and female presenting folks express as PMS is a direct result of sexism.

Periods come monthly, but this can vary a whole lot at the beginning. Write the date of your period on the calendar so you can keep track and learn how to predict it. Day one is the first day you see blood. There are many apps for your phone that track and predict your next period. Some of these apps sell your information to third parties and you must purchase. Here is a list of period tracker apps that do not store your personal data and does not use third party trackers: Clue, Drip, Euki, Periodical

Periods may be irregular at first, lasting 3 or 8 days. Typical blood loss is 5-6 tablespoons. Blood flow on the first day tends to be light, heaviest on day 2 or 3, then

lighter the next few days until it stops. There are different products you can use to manage your period such as menstrual cups, period underwear, pads, and tampons.

### **Typical Physical Symptoms of Menstruation:**

Painful symptoms such as cramps, backache, and tender breasts can usually be relieved by over the counter, anti-inflammatory pain relievers such as ibuprofen or naproxen.

Prescription medications (such as Ponstan) are also available. Warm baths or compresses can be useful to alleviate cramping. Constipation can make the cramps far more intense, and the hormones in the latter half of the menstrual cycle do increase constipation. Plenty of fluids, high fiber foods or a simple bulk forming stool softener such as psyllium can relieve pain.

(SOGC [www.yourperiod.ca](http://www.yourperiod.ca))

### **Not Typical Discomforts:**

You may feel like you need to lay down or may need more sleep when you have your period, but it is not typical to be physically unable to function due to period pain. If you find that your periods are difficult to manage, or they seem worse than what is described, it is time to see your doctor or nurse practitioner and request a consultation with a gynecologist that sees youth. Abnormal menstruation is usually normalized for women and folks with ovaries. Menstrual pain that cannot be managed through typical pain medication is not typical at any age.

### **Menstrual Products:**

There are a lot of options to manage bleeding during your period. Neither is better or worse, just different. You need to figure out what makes sense for you and what feels comfortable to you.

### **Disposable Pads:**

- They come in different sizes, thicknesses, and lengths, & with or without wings. You can use different ones during the day, at night, and on days where your period is heavier. There is an adhesive strip, so they stick to your underwear.
- You dispose of them by wrapping them in toilet paper and putting them into the receptacle in a public bathroom or the garbage bin at home. Pads and pantliners can be worn in your bathing suit if you are hanging around at the pool for competition as an extra precaution. Disposable pads need to be removed (not pantliners) before jumping into the pool as they will absorb water and get big!

### **Reusable Pads:**

- They also come in different sizes. You can use different ones during the morning or night. They typically have buttons that clip under your underwear. These pads can be worn in the water.

- To care for them wash them in the washing machine and then lay them flat to dry.
- Here is a link to a couple of companies that sell reusable pads:

Knix Teen (Canadian Company)  
<https://www.knixteen.ca>

Ruby Love  
<https://www.rubylove.com/en-ca>

Love Luna  
<https://www.loveluna.com/collections/reusable-pads>

### **Period Underwear:**

- Like pads they also come in different sizes and styles. They have period underwear that can manage heavy or light flow.
- To care for them wash them in the washing machine and then lay them flat to dry.
- Some people will choose to wear a reusable pad along with their period underwear.
- Here is a link to a couple of companies that sell period underwear.

Knix Teen (Canadian Company)  
<https://www.knixteen.ca>

Ruby Love  
<https://www.rubylove.com/en-ca>

Love Luna  
<https://www.loveluna.com/collections/reusable-pads>

### **Menstrual Cups:**

- Menstrual cups are reusable collection method during your period
- They come in many sizes and shapes. For most menstruating people under 16 a smaller cup is a little easier to manage.
- Like a tampon, they are put into the vagina and create a seal over your cervix that collects blood.
- They are made of soft silicone and are inserted into your body by folding them into a C and inserted into your vagina and seal over your cervix. Your cervix feels like a closed donut, the texture feels like the tip of your nose, it is usually located closer to the back of your vagina (see the attached diagram).
- Once they are full or every couple of hours, you remove them. Empty your cup into the toilet or sink, clean and re-insert.
- A menstrual cup can last for many years.
- Clue has an excellent page on inserting menstrual cups <https://helloclue.com/articles/culture/how-to-use-a-menstrual-cup/>

- If you can feel the tip coming out of your vagina, you might need a smaller size.
- The advantage of a menstrual cup versus a tampon is that they do not carry a risk of toxic shock syndrome and they are environmentally and economically friendly!
- Drug stores now sell menstrual cups.
- Here is an online link to some companies that sell menstrual cups:

Diva Cup

<https://divacup.com>

Nixit

<https://nixit.ca/>

### **Tampons:**

- Tampons come in many different shapes and sizes and with different applicators. They all have directions in the box to show you how to insert them. It may take some practice to figure this out and some tampons will work better for you than others.
- If possible, try to use a tampon for the first time while having a **heavy** flow day. You may need to try different techniques so you can insert and wear them comfortably.
- They should feel comfortable, you should not be aware you are wearing a tampon. Start by trying a “slim”/” lite” size.
- Change every 4-6 hours. Change before and after practice.
- In most places, you can flush tampons unless there are signs posted asking you not to. Plastic applicators go in the garbage or receptacle bin in the public washroom.

### **Be Prepared:**

Purchase a small bag or pencil case at the dollar store to keep in your school backpack and a second one for your swim bag (waterproofing is a good idea- therefore use a Ziplock bag inside the case). You never know when you will have your first period so you could prepare this now. If you are at the pool and don't have supplies ask your coach, a teammate, or an older swimmer from another team.

You can always talk to your coach or another adult that you trust to get more information!

### **Swimming with Your Period**

You can swim when you have your period. It is normal to feel nervous. Swimming with a menstrual cup, tampon or period bathing suit are all good options when you have your period.

Period swimwear is a great option for athletes and swimmers. Period swimwear comes in all different styles and colours. You can add an extra reusable pad for extra

protection. There are sport period bathing suits. You can purchase an all-black bathing suit for figures, and you can purchase bikini bottom to wear under your competition suit.

Here are some companies that sell period swimwear:

Knix Teen (Canadian Company)

<https://www.knixteen.ca>

Ruby Love

<https://www.rubylove.com/en-ca>

Everyone experiences their periods differently. It is important to listen to your body. What is your body telling you? What are you able to do? What are you not able to do? Typically, people have the most symptoms during their first and second day of their periods. Often this is relieved by rest, ibuprofen (Advil) and/or acetaminophen (Tylenol). Likely you will have practice during your period. Listen to your body. If you are not able to swim, honour that & let your coach know.

At some point you may have your period during a competition, listen to your body, do what you can do. Competitions are exciting and we know you want to be there! You are an important part of the team, but you and your body come first. In these circumstances, you can take a modified approach, for example, you can rest and then swim when you are needed. Talk to your coach, and they will help you plan.

**Have more questions? Check out these verified websites for more information!**

**Planned Parenthood**

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org>

**Society of Obstetrician Gynecologists of Canada**

<https://www.yourperiod.ca>

**Clue (website and app)**

<https://helloclue.com>

**Books:**

**You Know, Sex (gender neutral book on puberty and sex)**

By: Cory Silverberg & Fiona Smyth

<https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/you-know-sex-bodies-gender/9781644210819-item.html>

**Celebrate Your Body: The Ultimate Puberty Book for Girls**

By: Sonya Renee Taylor

[https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/celebrate-your-body-and-its/9781641521666-item.html?](https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/celebrate-your-body-and-its/9781641521666-item.html?ikwid=celebrate+your+body&ikwsec=Home&ikwidx=0#algoliaQueryId=6fb77fdb3c2ecd0a87b0276d036e0abb)

[ikwid=celebrate+your+body&ikwsec=Home&ikwidx=0#algoliaQueryId=6fb77fdb3c2ecd0a87b0276d036e0abb](https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/celebrate-your-body-and-its/9781641521666-item.html?ikwid=celebrate+your+body&ikwsec=Home&ikwidx=0#algoliaQueryId=6fb77fdb3c2ecd0a87b0276d036e0abb)

## Period: Twelve Voices Tell the Bloody Truth

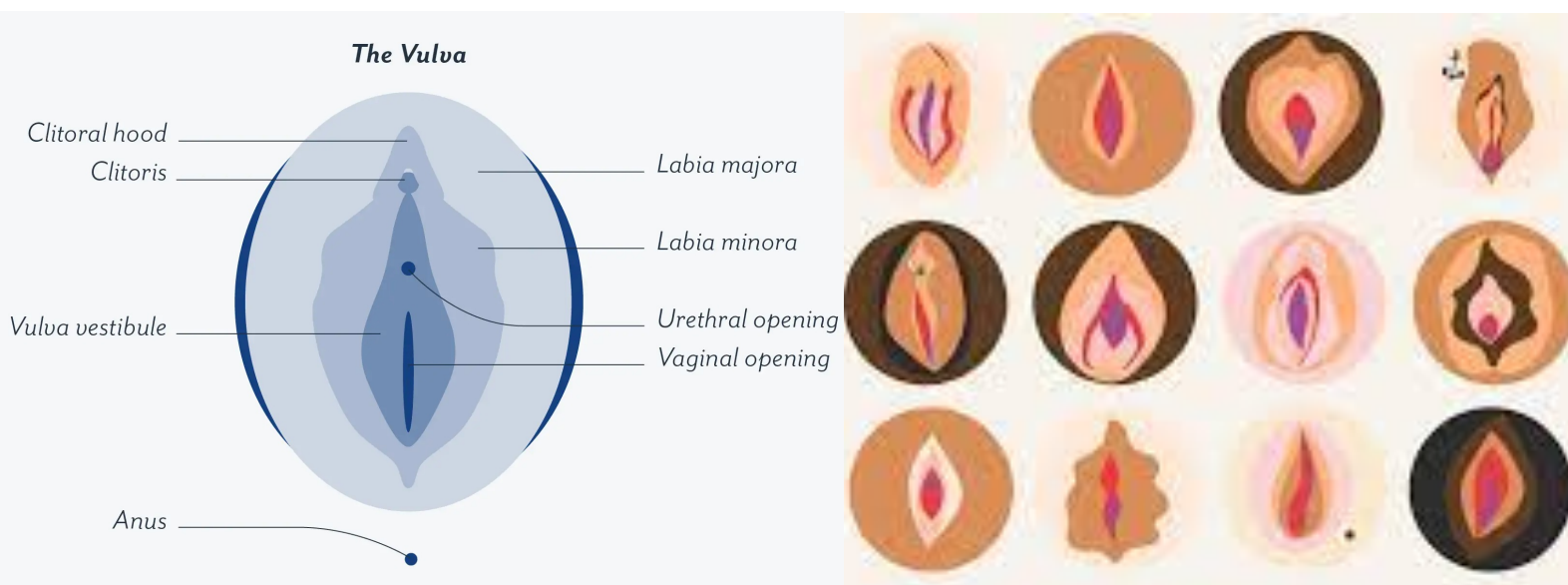
By: Kate Farrell

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## Anatomy:

**Vulvas** (all vulvas are different shapes and sizes):



Vulva Anatomy [www.helloclue.com](http://www.helloclue.com)

Vulvas [www.helloclue.com](http://www.helloclue.com)

**Cervix** (feel like the tip of your nose, typically located in the back of your vagina, donut like in shape):



Reproductive System:

